

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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GOVERNOR'S SPEECH WAS LONG ON PROMISES AND SHORT ON DETAILS

INDIANAPOLIS – State Rep. Vernon G. Smith (D-Gary) said the Gov. Mitch Daniels' State of the State speech Wednesday night raises more questions than it answered.

"There were many promises made, but no details," said Dr. Smith. "That's very troubling. On the positive side, I appreciate the governor's commitment to bio-fuels research. It is critical for our state. On the negative side, I am afraid I have many concerns. Gov. Daniels said he has momentum for change, but, according to recent polls, the Hoosier public is not supportive of his proposals. The governor's ratings are down significantly. That tells me Gov. Daniels needs to consider a new direction, one that is acceptable to Indiana residents. Change for change's sake is not necessarily a good thing."

One of the areas of concern for Dr. Smith was the privatization of the Department of Correction (DOC).

"The governor said he saved \$12 million by privatizing DOC," said Dr. Smith. "The administration makes the claim that the quality of food has increased, but all I am hearing from inmates are complaints. In particular, the inmates are writing to me that the private company is cutting back on the portions of food. That may seem insignificant to some, but it is important to the well-being of the inmates. Prisoners should pay their debt to society, but depravation, if it becomes extreme, can be considered cruel and unusual punishment.

"Decent meals with sufficient serving sizes help keep the hostility level lower, which should be a real concern for the safety of those who work in the prisons," Dr. Smith said. "There is no reason to create a potentially dangerous 'situation' because a company wants to save a few pennies by cutting back on food. I have heard numerous complaints from inmates over the years about DOC, but never about the amount of food being fed to them, until now. On top of it, loyal state employees have lost their jobs to this privatization that has been awarded to this and other out-of-state firms."

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"Job loss statewide is a great concern," added Dr. Smith. "Indiana has lost 7,000 jobs since Gov. Daniels took office. In addition, he has outsourced several of those jobs to out-of-state companies. The governor has not addressed this issue during his speech or at any other time, yet every Hoosier I know is deeply concerned about job loss."

Dr. Smith also expressed concern about toll roads.

"Gov. Daniels touted how much money could be generated by increasing fees on the Indiana East-West Toll Road," Dr. Smith said. "It is true that Indiana's tolls are low compared to toll roads in neighboring states, like Illinois. If significant funds can be raised by modestly increasing the tolls, then it is a prudent decision as long as the money is reinvested on Indiana roads."

"However, the privatizing of our state's roads is a different issue," continued Dr. Smith. "The higher tolls would be used to increase the company's profits. Years from now, Indiana may be faced, as California is today, with spending millions of dollars to fix the same toll road from which the private firm made a fortune, at Hoosiers' expense."

"The issue of selling or having a long-term lease to a foreign company is worrisome in itself," added Dr. Smith. "President Eisenhower advocated the building of interstates, in part, because of national security. The very thought of a foreign company owning or controlling Indiana roads is unsettling to many of us."

Property taxes also concern Dr. Smith.

"The Republican legislators, with the governor's support, passed what they called a balanced budget, when, in fact, it was not," explained Dr. Smith. "The Republicans basically shifted money away from property tax relief and put additional burden on schools and local government. Even if the tax amnesty money would be dedicated to property tax relief, it would be minimal compared to the increases expected statewide because of the Republican budget. In addition, the amnesty money is a one-time infusion, so it like a tiny band-aid used to fit a large wound."

